

Yet Still, You're Here

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Yet Still, You're Here

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Summary

Dream's half in love with George before they've even properly met.

It takes a while before George is ready to accept it.

NYC College AU.

Notes

See the end of the work for [notes](#)

The first time he meets George, there are two things Dream knows right away.

One: he's probably in love with George. He's halfway in love with him before they've even properly met.

Two: this boy will be the death of him.

Two minutes before they meet, Dream is considering leaving the party. It's a Friday night, sure -- but the party is loud, and he doesn't really know anyone here. Maybe it's more boring to spend the night alone in his apartment, but he's not having much fun here. He sighs, then puts away his phone, getting ready to leave. But then, he looks up, and he sees him.

One minute before they meet, Dream locks eyes with the beautiful stranger across the room,

holding a red solo cup. He watches as the boy smiles, and Dream gives him an awkward wave. He can feel his cheeks flush red, and runs his hand through his hair, very sheepish all of a sudden. The boy across the room smirks, as if he knows -- he has all of Dream already. The boy makes his way towards him, and even though the party is loud, Dream would swear that the boy must be able to hear how loudly his heart beats in his chest, just out of sync with the obnoxious music. He would swear that the boy knows, in that moment -- Dream's heart is already his.

One minute after they meet, the boy stands next to Dream, who is seated on a grimy couch, next to some kid from his calculus class that he's already forgotten the name of, and he tells him his name. Dream repeats it, trying it out, seeing how it feels to say it. It feels right.

Two minutes after they meet, George says something that's mildly snarky, incredibly sassy, and Dream throws his head back in laughter. Later, when he tries to recall it, can't remember what exactly it is that George said, but the way that George smiles at him -- that would forever be imprinted into his mind.

Ten minutes after they meet, Dream indicates that George should sit down. George points out that there's no room on the couch, and Dream smiles, and holds his hand out. George lets himself be pulled into Dream's lap, and Dream is very, *very* aware of how much smaller George is. He knows, for certain, that he could pick him up, put his hands on his thighs, bury his face in George's neck and leave pretty, pretty-

Two hours after the first time they meet, they're making out in the bathroom, the music from the party muffled, far away. Dream has his fingers tangled in George's hair, and George has his legs wrapped around him. Dream pushes him against the door just to hear him whimper.

And he swears, it's one of the prettiest sounds he's ever heard.

"Let me take you home," Dream whispers, between soft kisses. George makes some sound, and he leans his head back and almost hits it on the door. Dream moves the hand that is in George's hair almost instinctively, so George doesn't hit his head too hard. Protective.

It's easy to be protective, with George.

"Let me -- let me take care of you," Dream says, breath hot on George's skin. Another soft whimper.

"You don't-" he gasps, as Dream sucks on a particularly sensitive area. Dream's so *so* gentle, but he knows this will leave a mark. "You don't have to take care of me. Don't be gentle with me."

"Alright," Dream says, tugging on George's hair, hard enough to make him whine. "Let me take you home."

"Okay," George says, and Dream lets him down easy. George leans against the door, eyes closed, cheeks flushed, and Dream kisses the top of his head. George, still mildly dazed, places his hand on his neck, where the skin is already turning red. Dream puts his hand over George's own.

"That's going to bruise," Dream says, tracing over the reddened skin. George doesn't seem to care.

"Take me home," he says. He wraps his hand around Dream's own, intertwining their fingers.

And so he does.

They leave the bathroom together, and they're not subtle about it. One of George's friends, who is very much not sober, gives George an obvious wink and mouths the word *nice* in a very non-

discrete way. George gives a small wave and Dream smiles at the stranger, pulling George along through the crowd. Dream holds George's hand tight as he leads him out of the apartment, keeping him as close as possible.

They kiss again in the elevator. As soon as the doors shut, George wraps his hands around Dream's neck, and Dream finds it so, *so* endearing how he has to go on his tiptoes. Dream rests his hands on George's waist, where his shirt is riding up.

"I live a little far away," Dream says, as they pull apart. He keeps his hands on George's waist, under his shirt. "Twenty minutes by subway."

"I don't have a metrocard," George says. "Didn't bring my wallet tonight."

"I got you," Dream says, without hesitation. "Don't worry about it." The elevator doors open, and they walk out of the building, still hand in hand.

As they walk out into the cool autumn night, George shivers. Dream, noticing this, stops him, right outside the apartment building.

Dream takes off his denim jacket, and hands it over to George, who doesn't question him before pulling it on. It's oversized and George tries to scrunch up the sleeves, but the fabric is a little too stiff. Dream watches him struggle, just a little bit, before he reaches over, unbuttons the sleeves, and cuffs them for him. He feels George's gaze as he does this.

When he's done, George lets his hands fall to his sides, and Dream reaches over, fixing the collar of the jacket, folding it down. He eyes the mark on George's neck, runs his thumb lightly over it.

"There you go," Dream murmurs, softly. "All mine."

"If you call me yours like that, it means I'm going to break your heart," George says, in a tone that is only half joking. Dream takes George's hand once more.

"My heart is your heart," Dream says, in a tone that isn't joking at all. George swallows, seemingly nervous, and Dream leans in and presses his lips against George's forehead, a gesture that *should* feel a bit too intimate for someone he met only hours ago. But it just feels right. "At least for now."

For now is what he says. *Forever* is what he means. Dream doesn't realize it yet, not fully. But he lets this happen.

They walk to the nearest subway station, which is only a block away. Every so often, Dream glances over, admiring the way George looks, illuminated only by the yellowish light from the street lamps.

When they get to the subway station, Dream knows that he can just swipe George in. But instead, he goes to the machine, and buys George his own metrocard. Unlimited, for the next week.

"You don't have to do that," George murmurs. "It's expensive." He leans against Dream's arm as Dream presses buttons on the machine. His cheek pressed against Dream's shirt. "You could have just thrown me over the turnstile."

"I know," Dream says. He hands George the new card, and the boy takes it. "But I want to give you a way to get back tomorrow." *Or a way to visit me, if you want.*

They swipe in through the turnstile, and just manage to make the next train. They're the only ones in the car.

"It's about five stops," Dream says as they sit down. George hums in acknowledgement, then swings his legs over Dream's lap, pulling himself on.

"Hey," Dream says, wrapping his arms around George's waist. George links his arms around Dream's neck.

"Hey," George says, burying his face in Dream's neck. "Are we strangers?" George asks.

"Do you feel like we're strangers?" Dream asks. He puts his hands under George's shirt, rubbing circles along his skin.

"No," George says. He lifts his face from Dream's neck, facing him fully.

"Well, there's your answer," Dream says.

Then they kiss, alone in a subway car in the middle of the night, and they're not strangers then.

Later, Dream kisses every part of George that he can, leaving marks wherever George will let him. They're not strangers then either.

George falls asleep in Dream's arms that night, wearing Dream's shirt. Dream holds him, presses his hand against George's chest, feeling his heartbeat. Here, it is safe, and it is warm, and they are not strangers.

As sleep slowly takes him, Dream thinks that he and this boy, who he met only hours ago -- they've never been strangers.

George tastes like cherry chapstick and vodka.

Usually, Dream wouldn't mind. But it's 10:30 AM, fifteen minutes after George's first class had ended, and they're making out in the janitor's closet.

Dream was only meant to pick George up, maybe take him to lunch. If George would let him. (George never lets him). But George looked at him with those eyes, held one of Dream's hands with both his own, and spoke in that tone that Dream couldn't find himself ever saying no to.

So, Dream lets George pull him into the janitor's closet, and shuts the door behind them. He lets George press him against the wall, and leans down so George doesn't have to stand on his tiptoes.

It had been a few weeks since Dream had first met George. They didn't speak often. Or meet often, honestly. All of their meetings, somehow, ended like this: pressed against each other, wandering hands, wrinkled clothes. Maybe Dream minds this. He loves having George like this: all touch, no words. But he wouldn't mind a few dates.

His thoughts are interrupted when George presses himself against him in a way that has Dream biting his tongue to stay quiet. He looks down at George, who smirks. Dream moves his hand to tangle in George's hair, gripping. Not hard enough to hurt. Just enough so that he knows George feels it. A warning.

George looks at him with his face flushed, eyes wide. He's about to speak, but Dream brings his finger to George's lips in a shushing motion. George stares back up at him for a moment, eyes wide, before tugging Dream back down for another kiss. Dream accepts this, and brings the hand that isn't in George's hair down, moving underneath George's shirt, pressing against the small of his

back.

Somewhere, in between all of this, Dream vaguely realizes that George is wearing his jacket that he hadn't realized he was missing. He also realizes that George's water bottle, in the side pocket of his backpack, is definitely not filled with water.

"You're drunk," he murmurs into George's skin, when they've pulled apart. George presses him further against the wall of the janitor's closet, and he giggles.

"Just tipsy," George says, softly. "Not drunk."

"You're reckless," Dream says, leaning down further to press his lips against the smaller boy's neck.

"Yeah," George whispers, breathless. Dream moves his hand out from under George's shirt, cupping George's cheek, forcing him to look up.

"You're going to be the death of me," Dream says, and it feels like a promise.

"Yeah," George whispers once more, before he leans in and closes the gap between them.

Dream is in love with a beautiful boy who leaves him alone in the mornings and who doesn't love him sober, and it hurts, sometimes.

He deals with this. In his own little ways.

If "dealing with it" means letting George pull him closer by his belt loops, then proceeding to kiss and suck along his neck, then Dream is definitely dealing with it.

If it means putting his hands under George's shirt to leave scratch marks down his back, then Dream is dealing with it absolutely fine.

If it means pushing George against the door of the bathroom stall, and leaving marks on any bit of skin he can, Dream is absolutely nailing it.

He never does these things enough to hurt -- to really hurt. Just enough that George will still have marks all over him when Dream sees them next. Just enough so that when George is in his bed, Dream can kiss all of them. A tangible reminder that George, even for a little bit, is his.

George isn't his. They both know this. But Dream lets himself pretend, sometimes.

He kisses George and holds him like his life depends on it. He lets his hands wander, pushing George against the wall with a little more force than he needs to. But never too rough. Never enough to hurt.

His thoughts are a little hazy, honestly -- maybe it's from the alcohol, or maybe it's from the way that George grips the back of his shirt so tightly that Dream wouldn't be able to move away if he tried.

Vaguely, Dream wonders if they count as friends. He's somewhat labeled their relationship as "friends with benefits", but it's a lot more benefit than friend.

They don't hang out. Not really. This is how it usually goes: George will tell Dream about some party he's going to, and Dream will go just to see him. He'll find George eventually, talking to some

stranger, or drinking alone, in a corner. He'll put an arm around George, as if he can call George his. Maybe he'll make small talk with whoever George happens to be talking to, laughing at their jokes. But he keeps his entire focus on George.

When the other person inevitably leaves, probably sensing that they're intruding on whatever Dream and George have going on, Dream will talk to George with a practiced familiarity, making him laugh. He'll take the red solo cup from George's hands, drink whatever's left in it, and ask George to go home with him.

In this case, they hadn't made it to that last step. Not yet, at least. Sometimes, Dream lets himself be a little reckless, and lets George pull him to make out in places that are definitely not suitable for it. Like a public bathroom stall in some club, where anyone can walk in at any minute.

Dream pulls away from George, admiring him, for a second. They're both breathless -- George stares up at him with his eyes half-lidded, panting. He looks pretty, even in the bathroom lighting.

"Wanna get out of here?" Dream asks, in between pants. George looks up at him like he's stupid, and Dream nearly laughs at his expression.

"No, of course not, I'm so absolutely comfortable in this bathroom stall. I never want to leave," George says, voice dripping with sarcasm. Dream chuckles.

"Well," he says, leaning in, "if you were a little more patient, maybe we would have been in my bed by now."

He tugs George's hair, just a bit, as he speaks. George bites back a moan, and Dream can see him shiver.

"Let's get out of here," Dream says, in the same tone. George just nods, cheeks flushed pink.

On their way back to Dream's apartment, they just barely miss the light at a crosswalk. Dream sees the sign at the crosswalk flicker, counting down from two, to one, until the LED display shows a red hand. Dream stops, content to wait, but George grabs his hand and *runs* across the street, ignoring the honking cars. Dream follows him, of course, but chastises him once they are safe on the other side.

"You shouldn't do things like that," Dream says. George is panting, a little, but he smiles.

"What? I thought you already knew I wasn't patient," George says, mocking Dream's earlier sentiment. Dream rolls his eyes, but lets go of George's hand in favor of putting his arm around George's waist, pulling him close as they walk.

There hasn't been a night where George hasn't gone home with Dream. There hasn't been a morning where Dream has woken up with George.

He can't find it in himself to be resentful for this, though. He accepts this. Dream is treading unfamiliar waters now, but he doesn't mind.

How could he mind, really? At the end of the night, George always ends up in his bed, wrinkling his sheets, and looking so, *so* pretty.

"You look nice in my sheets," Dream says. George is lying on his chest, face down, shirtless on Dream's bed. Dream puts his hands on George's back, partially to trace the red scratch marks, partially to admire how small George looks under him.

"I think I always look nice," George says. There's something teasing in his tone. Dream chuckles, then leans in. His lips just barely touch his neck.

"You do," Dream whispers, a little too honest. George doesn't respond. But Dream feels him shiver.

George is intoxicating. He's rough, he's handsy, he's reckless in a way that Dream isn't familiar with. George is something unfamiliar. Something beautiful. George is beautiful.

"I don't want you to sleep with anyone else," Dream says. He lies back and stares at the ceiling, hyper-aware of George's presence next to him. George hums. His breaths are even, and he's almost asleep.

"I don't want to," George says, and he speaks so quietly Dream isn't sure he was meant to hear it. He speaks in a tone that's maybe a little too exclusive, considering that their entire relationship consists of them hooking up. But things have never been simple with George. Dream doesn't respond, but moves over so they're touching. George takes this for the invitation it is, and curls into him, content to fall asleep on Dream's chest.

It's George who falls asleep first, tonight. Neither of them had gotten dressed. Dream holds George as close as possible, feeling him breathe. Reveling in the way that it feels to have nothing in between them, to be able to leave soft kisses on George's bare skin, as George sleeps. Kissing all the marks he had left.

George doesn't know that Dream does this. But Dream does it anyway, gently. Until he falls asleep, George safe in his arms.

Sometimes, Dream wakes up in the middle of the night, before George has the chance to sneak out. When he does this, he stares at the sleeping boy beside him, watching as he breathes. He tries to imprint the image in his brain. George does look so much more relaxed when he's sleeping. Less reckless. More soft. He'll reach out and move George's hair out of his eyes, though George remains asleep.

I love you, he'll think. *I love you and you don't even know it. I love you and you probably know it. I love you and I need you to know it.* He'll pull George closer, curling his entire body around the smaller boy, clinging to him as if he can prevent George from leaving. As if he can keep him, call George his. *I love you*, he'll think. He's never brave enough to say it. The phrase will be on the tip of his tongue, sometimes. But it's too honest. Too close to the truth. So Dream never speaks. Just hopes George will be there in the morning.

Dream wakes up alone. George isn't there, this time.

He never is.

Dream isn't really one for smoking.

Sure, he's gotten high before, with some high school friends in some random parking lot during prom night. Granted, it wasn't that great of an experience. It involved a lot of coughing, and obnoxious laughter. Honestly, the most memorable thing from that night was how uncomfortable his suit was.

He wasn't a big fan of it then. If any of his old friends had asked him, he'd recount the experience with feigned fondness, the last moments of high school before he had set off to the city for college.

He'd politely decline if they offered again -- smoking with people he had once called friends just felt a little too strange. Dream wasn't even sure if he genuinely liked them, anymore.

But George asks him to, and when George smokes, he makes it look pretty.

Dream likes George a little too genuinely. He lets George pull him into random janitor's closets and bathroom stalls to kiss and be a little too loud. George lets Dream take him home, or takes Dream to his dorm if his roommate isn't around. He thinks maybe George might like him a little genuinely too. He hopes.

So Dream follows George to the balcony of the apartment, away from the party, and shuts the door behind them. It's quiet out here -- they were too high up to hear the trains passing beneath them, or to hear the cars honking, and with the balcony door closed, the music from the apartment is significantly muffled.

Objectively, the view from this balcony is gorgeous -- the New York City skyline is something that Dream would never grow tired of. Especially at night -- the lights from the buildings are pretty, making everything look a little lovely. Bright, even though the sky is dark. But when Dream looks down, and notices how *high* up they are, he blanches, pressing his back to the wall, physically as far away from the railing as he can be.

"Is something wrong?" George asks. Dream swallows, but forces himself to open his eyes, actively trying not to look down. He forces himself to look only at George, at his confused expression.

"I'm not a fan of heights," Dream admits. His voice wavers. George gives him a sympathetic look.

"It's not so bad," George says. He reaches over and takes Dream's hand. Dream intertwines their fingers and grips George's hand so tightly that his knuckles turn white. "Just don't look down."

"I'm trying not to," Dream says. George squeezes his hand gently. Dream squeezes back, gripping so hard that it might be a little painful for George.

"Come on, let's sit," George says. He tugs Dream's arm down. "You can't look down that way."

Dream obliges, sitting against the wall. George lets go of his hand, and takes a seat as well, leaning against the railing, too close for Dream's comfort.

"Don't sit so close to the ledge," Dream says.

"I'm fine," George says. He leans farther back, teasingly, fully pressing himself against the glass railing. Dream, despite his heart beating out of his chest, quickly moves forwards, grabbing George's hand and pulling him away.

"Just, sit next to me please," Dream says. His cheeks go slightly pink at how desperate his words sound. George smiles, and there's something teasing in his expression.

"I won't fall," George says. The amusement is clear in his tone. "You're too protective."

"You're too reckless," Dream counters. "You're going to give me a heart attack."

George goes quiet at this. His smile falters, giving way to an expression that Dream doesn't quite have a name for. Before Dream can question this, George scoots over, sitting next to Dream. So close that Dream could reach out and put an arm around him. But he doesn't, leaving a reasonable space between them.

As George lights the joint, Dream doesn't say anything. He just watches the way George closes his eyes when he inhales, watches him breathe. George hands him the joint before he exhales, and Dream takes it. He keeps it between his two fingers as he watches George exhale, admiring the way the smoke curls.

"You make that look pretty," Dream says. The admiration is clear in his tone. "You make everything look pretty."

"You're a dork," George says. He doesn't look back at Dream, eyes firmly affixed to the horizon. Dream tries not to let it bother him, instead bringing the joint up to take a hit.

He inhales too quickly, and coughs, throat burning. When Dream looks towards George, George is staring back at him, with amusement.

"It's been a while," Dream admits, sheepishly. George shifts such that he's fully facing Dream.

"You have to sort of inhale twice," George says. "Try again, but slower." Dream brings the joint back to his mouth, inhaling slowly. His gaze doesn't leave George's. "Inhale again, but wait until you can feel it here," George says. He places his hand on Dream's chest. Dream obliges.

"There you go," George says, as Dream exhales, without coughing. Dream hands him the joint, and watches again as George smokes.

George is so, so pretty. The sky is dark, but the light from the party outlines his silhouette. His cheeks are a little pink. He turns towards Dream and smiles, catching him staring. There's something playful there, like George is fully aware of the power he has over him. It's as terrifying as it is exciting.

"You're sweet," Dream says, still staring. "You don't show it often, but you're sweet sometimes."

"Just to you," George says softly. Before Dream can ask him what he means by this, George speaks again, changing the subject.

"Do you want to try something?" George asks.

Anything, Dream thinks. *Anything, if it's you.*

"What is it?" Dream asks instead. George reaches over, as if to hand him the joint. Dream takes it with his mouth, smiling when George rolls his eyes.

"Take a hit, but then exhale towards me," George explains. Dream obliges, inhaling deeply, then taking the joint out of his mouth.

George leans in, cupping his hands tightly. He inhales when Dream exhales, breathing in the smoke. He pulls away, closes his eyes, and coughs, slightly. The smoke comes out from his mouth and curls around him, and Dream just stares. He coughs a little more, then looks back up at Dream, giving him a sheepish smile.

Dream lets out a breath he hadn't realized he'd been holding, and the smoke curls around the two of them, sharing the same space. George smiles at his expression, then reaches out for the joint. Dream hands it off to him, staring as George takes another hit. This time, he doesn't cough. He hands the joint off to Dream, who takes it.

"I feel like I barely know anything about you," Dream says. His tone is soft, the words only for George to hear. George is silent for a moment, contemplating. Dream takes another hit, but doesn't

take his eyes off of George.

"You know me," George says, like it's the truest thing in the world. He doesn't meet Dream's stare, eyes affixed to some spot in the distance, contemplating. "You can always make conversation with me, and you know where I keep my spare dorm key. I think you might have memorized my class schedule, because you always manage to text me either right before or right after my classes. You know so much about me that I can't even think of."

You don't respond to those texts, Dream thinks. I didn't even think you read them.

"It's never enough, when it comes to you," Dream responds. George shakes his head softly, but his smile is so fond. "Tell me something."

"What do I tell you?" George asks. As Dream thinks, George takes the joint from his hand, inhaling deeply.

"Anything," Dream says. George exhales, and Dream watches the smoke. "Anything at all, if it's you." George hums, thinking.

"I can cry on command," George says.

"No way," Dream says. "Show me."

George laughs, shaking his head. He takes another hit off of the joint, before passing it off to Dream. Dream takes another hit, coughing, but only slightly.

"Come on," Dream urges, once he's caught his breath. "I wanna see."

"Tell me something, then," George says.

"What do I tell you?" Dream asks.

"Something to make me cry," George says. "Set the scene."

"Something sad?" Dream asks. "Or something happy?"

"Something good," George says.

"You're something good," Dream says. "I care about you a lot."

"You're cheesy," George says. "How's that supposed to make me cry?"

"You're such a brat," Dream says. He reaches over and ruffles George's hair. George ducks away, but he smiles. "I can't be mean to you, though. So you're going to have to deal with me being cheesy."

At George's lack of response, Dream continues.

"I care about you a lot," he says. He watches George's expression as he speaks at first, but ultimately decides it's too much. Dream looks away from George, instead choosing to stare at his hands.

Something good, Dream thinks. Something honest.

"You steal my things everytime you leave me in the morning," Dream says. He's unsure if he's being a little too honest. But he can't bring himself to care. "The first time, it was my jacket, and

honestly, I hadn't realized you took it until I saw you wearing it. I know you still have it. I didn't say anything, because I like the way it looks on you."

He doesn't meet George's gaze, not now. He fidgets with his fingers, still apprehensive.

"I'm pretty sure you took my charger too," Dream continues. "And my spare apartment key. And probably a lot of other things I haven't realized yet. Don't think I don't notice -- you like to steal my things. But I don't mind, because it's you. So I just let you."

He's made his decision. To be honest, maybe too honest at this point.

"It did confuse me at first. But I think I kind of get it. I like seeing you in my things. I like leaving marks whenever you let me, and I always look at the hickeys I give you, the visible ones at least," Dream says. His cheeks turn slightly pink when admitting these things out loud. "I like thinking that you're mine, or maybe that you were mine, at least for a little bit. Proof that we were together for a little bit. I think that maybe you taking my things is your way of doing that for me. Having proof that you were mine for a little bit. I don't know though. That's just what I'd like to think."

George is quiet. Dream doesn't look back up at him.

"I think you also took one of my nice button-ups, which is a shame," Dream says. His tone is a little lighter now. "Not because you took it, but because you never let me see you wear it."

George taps his shoulder. Dream meets his gaze, and is taken aback at how red his eyes are, at how his cheeks are wet with tears.

"What's wrong?" Dream asks.

"That shirt is too big, I look so stupid when I wear it," George says. At first, Dream is confused, but then he notices how George's lips twitch, like he's trying not to burst into laughter.

"Fuck off, I thought you were actually upset," Dream says, shoving him lightly. George does start laughing at this, wiping the tears off of his cheeks. Dream, in spite of himself, laughs along, shaking his head fondly.

"I told you I could fake cry," George says. This time, Dream does reach over and put his arm around George, pulling him closer. George lets this happen, and rests his head on Dream's shoulder.

"That's too believable, you're not allowed to do that around me," Dream says. He rubs George's shoulder. "I don't like seeing you sad."

"I don't like seeing you sad either," George admits. "You sounded a little sad then. I'm glad I could make you laugh."

Dream rubs George's shoulder again, then passes him the joint. George takes it, and Dream watches him smoke. He closes his eyes on the inhale, and doesn't open them.

"You're staring at me," George says, eyes still closed. Dream smiles softly, though George can't see it.

"It's a habit of mine to stare at beautiful things," Dream says. He makes no attempt to hide his fondness.

"You always say things like that," George says. He opens his eyes, but doesn't look at Dream.

"Is that a problem?" Dream asks. He keeps staring, not caring if George knows.

"Maybe it is," George says. He's about to take another hit, but Dream takes the joint from him, playfully.

"You're doing that thing again, where you talk to me but don't really tell me anything," Dream says, before bringing the joint to his mouth.

"I don't know how to stop that," George says.

"Just tell me something," Dream says. "I like hearing you talk."

George is quiet for a while, and Dream takes a hit. He half expects George to not speak again. Dream's prepared to just continue smoking until the joint is done. Then, Dream would ask to take him home, and George would say yes, because that's just how things worked between them. But George surprises him.

"Do you ever get sad? Like really, really sad?" George asks. His voice is ever so slightly unsteady, like he's hesitating. If he were speaking to anyone else but Dream, they wouldn't have noticed. There's so much vulnerability in his voice. Dream takes the joint out of his mouth, and puts it out on the wall. He places the remainder on the floor, giving George his full attention.

"Yeah," Dream responds, because he's known sadness, and he understands what George means by this.

It's not the occasional situational sadness, or even a type of sadness that has any real reason. It's the dense, pervasive sort of sadness -- the kind that's there, demanding itself to be noticed even when it has no place. Perhaps it's like yearning for someone who already loves you, mourning for someone who hasn't left yet. It makes no sense. It's nonsensical sadness. The aching kind.

"Me too," George says. He says his next words casually, as if remarking on the weather. "It tried to kill me, the sadness. But I didn't die."

Dream feels his heart sink, he feels a pit in his stomach at what George is implying. There's a part of him that wants more details, but he knows that if he gets more details, he might actually throw up, here on this balcony, that feels way too high all of a sudden. What he wants to do is head back to the ground, what he wants to do is to hold George on his bed and kiss all parts of him, what he wants to do is cling to this boy and never let go.

"Did you want to?" Dream asks, and he hates how pathetic he sounds. How desperate. Asking questions that he already knows the answer to.

"I didn't not want to," George says. His voice is steady, but Dream sees that his hands are shaking. This is hard for him.

Dream reaches over, and he holds both of George's hands in one of his own. He moves so he's fully facing George, and rests his free hand on George's cheek, lightly rubbing his thumb against this. George lets this happen. He takes a breath that is noticeably shaky, and leans into Dream's touch.

"I can't imagine never seeing you again. I think I'd break down," Dream admits.

"And what if I left? If I disappeared?" George asks, and he sounds so, so small. His entire body stiffens, like he's preparing for something like a rejection -- like Dream could ever accept his absence. As if Dream hadn't felt the ache of him leaving, as if he hadn't woken up and reached for a body that is no longer there, as if he didn't lie in the space George left behind, yearning for

someone who never stayed long enough.

Dream is reminded, in this moment, once again -- George will be the death of him, and he's letting this happen.

"Then I'd spend the rest of my life chasing wild leads on you," Dream says, like a promise.

"You don't mean that," George says.

"I do," Dream says.

George closes his eyes, taking a breath before he speaks again.

"It gets better, I hope, the sadness," George says. "There exists a happiness that is so grand that you forget you've ever been sad."

I know that feeling, Dream thinks. *That's you*. His throat runs dry.

"Does it last?" Dream asks, though he already knows the answer. George meets his gaze, and gives Dream a smile that looks too much like pity.

"I hope so," George says.

Me too, Dream thinks. He pulls George closer to him, and buries his face in George's hair. George laughs at the sensation.

Me too, George.

George is at some bar uptown, wearing Dream's jacket, taking shots alone at the bar.

Dream is a little tipsy already. He had been drinking in his apartment when George, after two weeks of almost complete radio silence, texted him with just a location.

Part of him is hurt, honestly. After their conversation on that balcony, Dream had thought that maybe things could change -- that this "friends-with-benefits-but-barely-friend-more-benefit" relationship could shift, ever so slightly, into more of a friendship. Maybe even a sort-of-kind-of relationship.

That night, George was the one who kissed him first, who looked at him with shining eyes, and asked if Dream wanted to leave. Of course, Dream had obliged. Something had changed, he felt it. They were gentle that night -- gentle in a way they hadn't been before. So caring.

"I care about you," George had said, before drifting off. "More than anyone else." Dream hadn't responded. But he had pulled George as close as possible, embracing him as he slept. Hoping he understood.

He wants this. He loves having George the way he is -- wandering hands, stolen kisses, and teasing glances -- but Dream wants more.

He thought he had it. He almost had it. But it had slipped out of his grasp.

He woke up alone again, the next morning. He tried not to let it bother him.

George, after that conversation, had completely ignored Dream for two weeks. For the first few

days, Dream had thought nothing of it -- it was midterm season, and George was a fairly good student. But then a few days turned into a week. Then two. Two weeks of absolutely nothing. Ignored texts, rejected phone calls.

And Dream had no idea what to think about being ghosted. He's unsure if he should meet George at this bar, but both he and George know that Dream could never say no to him. Part of him is hurt, yes. But a bigger part of him wants to see George.

When he sees George in his jacket, sitting alone, there's another part of him that feels bitter.

I haven't seen you in two weeks, yet you're sitting alone, and you still look like you're mine, Dream thinks.

But despite this, Dream makes his way to George, takes a seat next to him, and takes the shot from George's hand and downs it in one go.

"Haven't heard from you in a while," Dream says, ignoring the way his throat burns. He doesn't glance back at George, instead staring at the empty shot glass in his hand. He doesn't try to hide the bitterness in his tone -- he's hurt.

"Yeah," George says. His tone isn't apologetic -- there's almost no guilt in his words.

Dream glances over at George, and gives him a once-over. He seems emotionless, but there are bags under his eyes, and he looks a little tired. He's wearing Dream's jacket, and despite the hurt Dream feels, he still likes the sight of George in his clothes.

"Are you alright?" Dream asks. He eyes George's neck, how his skin is pale and smooth and completely unmarked, a clear sign that it's been a while since Dream has been able to take him home.

"Why wouldn't I be?" George asks. There's a part of him that sounds annoyed at Dream's question, and Dream is more than a little hurt by this.

Dream doesn't justify George's question with a response. He just calls over the bartender, orders a drink, and lets George sit in silence for a bit.

"You're mad at me," George says, after a while. It doesn't sound like a question.

"A little bit," Dream admits. His words aren't as bitter anymore, more sad. "I care about you. And I thought you knew that. But you left and I thought you didn't want me anymore."

"I do," George says. Dream isn't sure which part of his statement George is responding to. But he supposes that this doesn't matter.

"Doesn't seem like it," Dream says. The bartender brings over his drink. Dream pointedly avoids George's stare, instead choosing to drink, deciding that this would be easier if he were a lot less sober. George, it seems, is deep in thought. Dream looks towards George, and George stares off, eyes focused on seemingly nothing, pointedly avoiding Dream's gaze. Some part of Dream hopes that maybe George feels guilty. But it doesn't seem like it.

"I value trust over love," George says. It's a sudden statement, and it's jarring. It has nothing to do with their conversation. Dream feels something that's almost resentment bubble in him. But no part of him could ever bring itself to resent any part of George.

"Why?" Dream asks. He puts his drink down, but doesn't look back at George.

"Trust is a choice. Love isn't," George says. Dream mulls over the words while he finishes off his drink. George orders another drink for himself.

"I'll give you both," Dream says, once the bartender has walked away, because even now, even when he's upset -- he wants to give George both.

"You don't mean that," George says, and he sounds small. It's the first time this night that Dream is able to detect any emotion in his words.

"I do," Dream says, completely genuinely. "I mean every word."

"You're always so nice to me," George says. He sighs, closing his eyes. "I think I'll remember you forever."

Dream feels the sentiment within the statement, and some part of him feels warm at George's words. But a bigger part of him feels resentment.

"I hate it when you do that. When you talk to me like it's the last time we'll ever speak," Dream says. The words come out harsher than he intends, but Dream doesn't regret it.

George is quiet, for a bit. The bartender brings over his drink, but George eyes it with distaste. He hands it off to Dream, who accepts it.

"Sometimes I think some part of me hates you," George says. Dream doesn't respond right away, instead choosing to take one long swig of the drink, ignoring the way it burns.

"Why?" Dream asks. His voice is a little raspy, but George pays no mind.

"You make me weak," George says. He stares at his hands as if they're the most interesting thing in the world. Dream stares at George as if he is the entire world.

"How do I make you weak?" Dream asks. He doesn't break his gaze. He watches as George fidgets, mildly uncomfortable.

"You make me love," George says. Dream knows that some part of this is meant to be vulnerable, but it's not. He knows it's not, because he knows George better than he'd like to admit. George, who wouldn't apologize for ignoring him for two weeks, but would almost confess in a random bar in the middle of the night, after the fact, and hope Dream will take it for the apology it is.

But Dream can't. Not tonight. Instead, Dream finishes the drink, then waves over the bartender. He hands over his card, and pays for his and George's tab.

It's quiet between them. Neither of them speak until Dream gets handed his card back, at which point he gets up, moving away from the bar.

"Let's get out of here," Dream says. George nods, but there's something hesitant there. There is something serious in Dream's tone. Leaving wasn't reckless, and it wasn't rushed, due to a desperate need for them to be in each other's arms. There's something weighted in the quiet between them, and it's terrifying.

They both ignore it, for a bit. They walk out of the club, and at some point, George grabs Dream's hand. Dream takes it with no hesitation, but when George squeezes, in a gesture that Dream thinks should be reassuring, Dream ignores it. He simply pulls him along, walking into the train station, saying nothing.

They get onto the train, and they sit next to each other, still with the same weighted quiet. After the train starts moving, George speaks.

"What's wrong?" George asks.

Are we okay? Dream hears.

"I don't know what's wrong," Dream says.

I don't think so, he means.

"What's not right, then?" George asks. Dream sighs. He feels his heart pounding, and he feels, suddenly, a desperate need to be honest. Part of it is how he hasn't seen George in two weeks, and how George's absence, albeit admittedly not for that long, is almost palpable. The other part is something Dream doesn't quite understand. Maybe it's how he's a little more drunk than he'd usually get, and how George is a little more sober than he usually is. Maybe it's the way that Dream doesn't think he's ever *seen* George sober.

Can you stand to see me sober, George? Dream thinks. He almost asks this question. But he's not sure if he wants to know the answer.

Dream looks towards George, and is brave and stupid and reckless all at once.

"I want-" he takes a deep breath, and lays it all out on the table. "I want to take you out on a date. Somewhere nice. I'll take you out to dinner, I'll even dress in a fucking suit like an idiot and let you order the most expensive thing on the menu." George stares at him now, eyes wide with an emotion Dream doesn't care to place. Dream looks away. "I'll take you to my place after, and-" he takes a deep breath. It's shaky.

"I want to be gentle with you. I want you to be there when I wake up."

"I don't deserve that," George says, and he sounds small. He makes some sort of choked sound, and Dream can physically feel the ache in his chest as he realizes that George is trying his best not to cry.

"You deserve so, so much more," Dream says.

George has his eyes screwed shut, as if Dream's words are physically painful. Dream reaches over, placing a hand on George's shoulder. George flinches away.

"Don't-" George stops. "Stop that."

"George, I want you," Dream says. It feels like a confession, but it's nothing that George doesn't already know. "I just want to call you mine."

I love you, Dream thinks. George doesn't look back at him, and Dream doesn't dare move closer. He stills, heart pounding in his chest, as he waits for George to speak. George is quiet for a long time. But then, he takes off the jacket he's wearing - *Dream's* denim jacket - and hands it to Dream, wordlessly. It's the same jacket that Dream had put on him the first time they had met. Dream takes it, because he's not sure what to do with his hands, and he clenches the fabric so hard his knuckles turn white.

"I'm not yours," George says, after a while. It feels like a rejection, but it's nothing that Dream doesn't already know. Dream feels his heart sink to his stomach.

I don't love you back, Dream hears. George goes quiet again, and Dream feels his face go hot in shame. There's a part of him that wants to cry, but he forces the emotions down. He moves to hold the jacket in his arm, then shoves his hands in his pockets, trying to hide the way they're shaking.

"You-" George's voice wavers. "You scare me. This scares me."

"I don't want to scare you," Dream says, and he knows he sounds desperate and terribly miserable.

Have I ruined this? Part of this? All of this? Dream thinks.

"But you do," George says. He sounds so, *so* small.

You have, Dream hears. *You've ruined it*.

"I don't want to," Dream says, and his voice catches. He's trying to stay collected, but it's hard. He's sure that George can tell as well. George ever so slightly moves back. Dream swallows, taking a few more deep breaths. George doesn't say anything.

After a bit, Dream speaks again, and shocks himself with how steady his voice is.

"I'm going home," Dream says. "And I want you to come, but I know that you won't. Because I don't want to do anything but sleep next to you. And you can come with me, and you know you can come with me, but you won't."

"Dream-"

"I can't-" Dream cuts himself off, forcing himself to take a few deep breaths. "Sorry. You just broke my heart a little bit," he says. He laughs, but there's nothing that's funny.

"I'm sorry," George says. There's guilt in his tone, which makes Dream feel worse.

"No, you're not," Dream says. "Well, maybe for hurting me. But not for not loving me." He gives George a smile, but he knows it's unconvincing. "But that's okay. Because I still care about you. And I'll be here for you, even if you don't feel the same."

The train stops, and Dream gets up, leaving. George doesn't make any move to follow him, and for the first time, Dream goes home alone.

Dream has his jacket in his hands, and George has Dream's heart in his hands as Dream leaves the subway car. Dream lets this happen.

At first, Dream is bitter.

He tries not to think of George. He doesn't text George. He doesn't call George. Sometimes, he'd get close -- he'd stare at the contact in his phone, thumb hovering over the call button. But he'd never follow through. He knows what would happen: he would end up asking George to come over, or end up going to wherever George is and taking him home. They would forget the sort-of argument they had on the train, but also forget the conversation they had on the balcony. The first meaningful one.

Dream doesn't think he wants to forget either. He doesn't really know what he wants, specifically. He knows that he wants George. But George doesn't want him. Dream tries to accept this.

But then George starts calling him.

Dream tries to ignore George's calls. But he never can -- he always picks up the phone.

The first call is in the middle of the night. Dream had been asleep -- he had to do a double take, once he realized who was calling.

"I'm at a party," George says, once Dream picks up the phone. He doesn't bother with a hello. There's music in the background. Dream blinks, half-asleep, then squints at his phone screen.

"It's late," Dream says. He tries to keep the concern out of his voice -- leaving it simply as a statement of fact.

"Yeah," George says. He sounds drunk. "Did you just wake up?"

"Yeah," Dream says. He moves to sit up, leaning against his arm. "Do you want me to come get you?"

"Why'd you answer me if you were sleeping?" George asks, avoiding Dream's question. Dream takes this as a no. He had asked the question before he fully thought about it -- but he would have come at the drop of a dime, if he thought George wanted him there.

"I have it set so your calls go through, no matter what time," Dream says. He lays back down, closing his eyes.

"Still?" George asks.

"Always," Dream says. If Dream were being honest -- changing his phone settings so George's calls wouldn't go through Do Not Disturb anymore had never even been a thought.

"Are you still mad at me?" George asks. Dream swallows. He knows the answer, but he doesn't want to think about it.

"I think you already know the answer to that," Dream says.

You broke my heart a little bit, Dream means.

"Yeah," George says.

I know, Dream hears.

He hangs up before Dream can respond. Part of Dream is concerned. But he doesn't call George back, not now.

He stays up for another two hours, just in case George calls again. But he doesn't.

It's a few more days before George calls again.

"It's cold tonight," George says. He never bothers with a hello. His words are slow, and his voice shakes. It sounds like he's either shivering or trying not to cry. Maybe both.

"Are you drunk?" Dream asks.

George is never sober, not even when he calls just to talk, Dream thinks.

"I'm high," George says. He coughs. Dream can hear the wind in the background, and he vaguely remembers how cold it's supposed to be tonight. "In the park. Next to the fountain. M'cold, Dreamie."

"You should have kept my jacket," Dream says, before he can stop himself. Most of the resentment he had felt towards George had faded, replaced with more of a concerned sadness.

This boy made his heart ache.

"I'm not yours," George says, like a reminder.

"That's not my choice," Dream says. "If it were up to me, you would be."

"I know," George says.

"Do you want me to come get you?" Dream asks.

George ends the call, not giving Dream a response.

He never is here in the morning, when he used to come here, Dream thinks. Now he always has to be the one to hang up.

Dream's not bitter, not anymore. Just sad. He misses George.

The only time they talk is through these late-night calls. George calls him a few more times. Always in the middle of the night. Never when he's sober.

Dream always asks if George wants him to go find him. George never gives him a response. Dream takes this for the rejection it is.

One night, when he's feeling particularly lonely, Dream calls George.

It's almost 2 AM, on a Sunday, and Dream knows George has an 8 AM class on Mondays. But he calls anyway, not really expecting George to pick up.

George picks up before the second ring.

"Hello?" George says. He sounds like he's asleep.

"Sorry," Dream says. He whispers, as if they're in person -- as if he can be soft with George, even through the phone. "Did I wake you?"

"Yeah," George says. "But it's okay. Because it's you."

"I didn't expect you to pick up," Dream admits. "But I missed you."

"I have your calls set to go through no matter what too," George says. He sounds groggy. "I sleep on my phone sometimes, just in case you call."

So, George isn't drunk, Dream realizes. But he's half-asleep, and probably admitting to things that he wouldn't normally admit to Dream.

"I didn't know that you did that," Dream says.

"Well, now you do," George says.

Dream doesn't respond, still wrapping his head at the blatant caring gestures by George.

I didn't think you cared that much, Dream thinks.

"I miss you too," George says, at Dream's lack of response. "I miss seeing you." George hasn't said

this before, no. But as he listens, Dream realizes that he already knew that George had missed him.

"I'll be there if you need me," Dream says. "All you need to do is ask."

"I don't know if I believe you," George says.

"Well then," Dream says. "I'll show you. You just have to let me."

"That's easier said than done," George says.

"I'll wait for you to be ready," Dream says. "Forever, if I have to."

George is silent for a long time. Dream almost thinks that George must have hung up, but then he speaks.

"Thank you," George says, before he hangs up.

"I love you," Dream says, to an empty room.

Dream is there when George needs him. Even if George doesn't know it, or doesn't think that Dream will be there -- Dream's always there, when it comes to him.

Tonight, George is a wreck.

They hadn't come to the party together, no -- but George had texted Dream earlier, letting Dream know that he would be there, heavily implying that Dream should come. They both knew that Dream wouldn't say no to an offer like that.

It's Saturday night -- the last time they had spoken was when Dream had called George, a few days prior. Something had shifted that night. Or maybe it didn't. What Dream knows is that either everything is exactly the same as it was, or completely different. He's not sure which he prefers.

When Dream gets to the party, he doesn't look for George at first. The apartment this party is at is pretty large -- multiple floors, with lots of people Dream doesn't know. He pays no mind to them, and grabs a drink from some random cooler, just to have something to do with his hands. He wanders, mingling, drinking until he's just a bit tipsy. Keeping an eye out for George.

But the first time that Dream sees George that night, George is shotgunning a beer with someone Dream doesn't recognize. Dream watches from a distance as the stranger tries to show George how to shotgun a beer, using a pair of keys.

The stranger uses the keys to pierce a hole in the can, then hands the keys off to George. Then, the stranger puts his mouth to the hole, then tilts the can, opening it while doing so. He then downs the beer in just a few gulps. The stranger puts his empty can on the ground and crushes it with his foot, then urges George to try it himself. So George shotguns a beer.

George tries to shotgun a beer. Well, it's more like half a beer. The other half George spills over himself -- his movement a little too uncoordinated for Dream's comfort. The stranger laughs at George's mistakes, patting him on the back. George gives a smile, despite his soaked shirt.

Dream takes this as a cue to make his presence known. He walks towards George, and puts an arm around him. George stiffens at the touch, but immediately relaxes when he realizes who it is.

"Hey stranger," Dream says, playfully pulling George closer. George stumbles, slightly, a

movement which makes Dream confused -- George was usually more graceful.

"Hi Dreamie," George says. He giggles, as if Dream's name is one of the loveliest things in the world. George looks up at him.

"How are you tonight?" Dream asks, immediately feeling more comfortable now that George is with him.

"I'm- I'm high," George says, still with that same giggly tone. "A little too high. Also drunk."

"You smell like beer," Dream points out. He leans down and gives George a soft kiss on the top of his head.

"Are you smelling my hair?" George asks. Dream stands straight up, now a bit more concerned.

"Yeah," Dream says. He slowly leads George away, looking to find a quiet corner where they can talk. "You smell like weed."

"I smoked a little," George says. He trips, and would have fallen, but Dream catches him by his arm. "Well, maybe more than a little. Then I had some edibles."

"Did the edibles kick in yet?" Dream asks. He's mildly concerned, now -- George usually knows his limits. But something about George's tone, as well as the way he clings to Dream's shirt like he's scared he might fall, gives Dream a bad feeling.

"Kinda," George says. He giggles, though Dream isn't sure what's funny. "I drank a lot," George says, in a matter-of-fact tone.

"How much?" Dream asks. They settle in a quiet area near a wall. Dream stands against the wall, and George leans forwards and presses his forehead against Dream's chest, clinging to Dream's shirt and breathing deeply.

"Some jello shots," George says. He exhales his words, as if tired. "Then some regular shots," he continues, "then a few beers. But I spilled one, Dreamie."

"I saw," Dream says, trying his best to keep himself from sounding too concerned, as to not startle George. But he's being serious, to the point in a way that George isn't used to from him. He watches as George's expression falters, as his cheery demeanor falls away to something more sad. "You okay?"

"I'm a little fucked up," George says. He sounds sad, like he's not just talking about the drugs and the alcohol.

"You're fine," Dream says, trying to sound reassuring. But he can't keep the worry out of his voice. George, sensing this, looks away, and Dream has the horrible realization that he's trying not to cry.

"I'm a lot fucked up," he says, and he sounds so sad. "I don't- don't know why you like me."

"George," Dream says, because he doesn't know what else to say. George steps closer to him, and Dream instinctively wraps his arms around him.

"I'm not having fun," George says. He sniffles, and his shoulders shake. "I- I didn't wanna come here."

"Why are you here then?" Dream asks. He holds George so, so tightly.

"Because I wanted you," George says, in a tone that breaks Dream's heart.

"I would've come see you if you just wanted me to," Dream says. George makes a sound that's almost a laugh, but sounds more like a sob.

"It's stupid if I'm alone getting fucked up," George mumbles into Dream's shirt. "It's less stupid if I'm not alone. Less pathetic."

Dream moves his hand to George's shoulder, rubbing his skin in what he hopes is a soothing manner.

"I'm pathetic," George says, and Dream has never heard him sound this miserable before. "I'm sorry." Dream tries to pull away, slightly -- get a good look at George's face, but George clings to him like he's scared Dream might just disappear.

"Let's get out of here," Dream says. George doesn't answer, instead clinging to Dream's sleeves more. He leans into Dream almost fully at this point -- Dream has to support almost his full weight.

"Let me get you out of here," Dream says, quieter. George nods, but it's slow and disoriented, and Dream can tell he's not fully aware.

The party isn't far from Dream's apartment. It's a bit of a walk, but it's not so far. Dream had walked to the venue earlier this evening, and it hadn't taken him too long.

But that was without an absolutely plastered George clinging to him with every step. So instead of having to haul George a few blocks, Dream opts to call an Uber, praying that George doesn't throw up in it.

When the car arrives, they get in, and the driver gives Dream a look that's half pity, and half I-will-kill-you-if-your-friend-throws-up-in-my-car. Dream tries his best to look apologetic, mentioning that the ride won't take long.

As they drive, Dream keeps a close eye on George, who is fully leaning against him.

"Didn't like that. There were a lot of people there, and I don't like when people touch me," George says softly. His words slur together, and he's quiet, speaking into Dream's shirt.

"You let me touch you," Dream says. He moves his hand to George's hair, which is mildly damp with sweat and maybe some of the beer that George had spilled earlier. George's shirt is damp as well, a fact that Dream is very keenly aware of in the cold night. Almost subconsciously, he pulls the smaller boy closer to him.

"You're different," George says. "You're always-" Dream tries to adjust his grip on George, wanting to make him more comfortable. George, misinterpreting his movements, clings tighter to Dream's shirt, whining. Dream shoots another apologetic glance at their Uber driver.

"Don't leave," George says, in a tone that makes Dream's heart drop. "I don't want you to leave me alone."

"I'm not leaving you," Dream says. George sloppily tries to get on Dream's lap -- Dream guides him there gently, gathering the boy in his arms.

"Promise?" George asks. He lays his head on Dream's shoulder. The Uber driver glances back at them in mild annoyance, but Dream ignores this.

"Promise," Dream says. The rest of the way isn't long, but it feels too long -- Dream wants nothing more but for George to be warm and safe in bed.

When they arrive at Dream's apartment, Dream moves George off of his lap, much to the protest of the latter.

"Come on," Dream says, at George's whining. "Let's get you to bed." He bids a goodnight to their Uber driver, making a mental note to increase his tip later.

He half-leads, half-carries George to his front door. By the time they've stepped foot inside his apartment, Dream decides that it will just be easier to pick George up, princess-style. George accepts this easily, letting Dream pick him up like it's nothing. Dream carries him to the bedroom, where he lays George down on his bed. He turns on the lamp on his bedside table, which illuminates his room in a soft yellow glow. Dream then works to remove George's shoes and socks, placing them to the side.

Dream sits on the bed, next to George, then works to remove his own shoes. He's completely expecting George to fall asleep in the short time it takes him to do this, so he's taken aback when George speaks.

"Are you going to fuck me now?" George asks. He says this casually, as if it's something to be expected. It makes Dream nearly choke.

"What-" Dream, taken aback, starts his sentence off almost shouting, but falters when George covers his ears at the noise. "What are you talking about?" Dream asks, in a much softer, but still quite concerned, tone.

"It's okay," George says, and he lays back on the bed, expectant. "I don't mind. I trust you." He kicks off his pants, pushing them off the bed with his foot. Though he has seen George in less than just his boxers, Dream still looks away, because everything about this feels wrong.

"George, I'm not going to do that," Dream says. He closes his eyes, then takes a deep breath before he speaks again. "That's horrible."

"Didn't know you thought I was that horrible," George says, in a tone that's way too far from teasing for comfort. Dream feels his heart pang.

"That's not what I mean," Dream says. "You're drunk. Probably still a little high too. I'm not going to take advantage of that."

"You're letting me stay here. You take care of me even when you don't need to." George sits up and pulls off his shirt. He throws it to the floor in a careless motion, and though it's something he's done countless times before, he apologizes. "Sorry," George says, staring at the crumpled shirt on the ground. He sighs, and lies down once more. "Could have been neater with that."

In spite of how concerned he feels, Dream can't help but glance over George. In the time that Dream has known him, George has always been a bit skinny -- but he looks like he's lost some weight since the last time they've met. He also looks exhausted, like he hasn't slept properly for a bit. Vaguely, Dream wonders if he's been eating enough. Or sleeping enough. He looks over George's skin, along his neck, his collarbones, down his chest, over places where Dream liked to leave marks. They had faded, as it had been a while since they had last seen each other. Like Dream had never been there.

But Dream was here now, and George was in his bed, and Dream was too concerned to dwell on

this any longer.

"George, do you think I'll only let you stay here if you let me-" Dream doesn't finish his sentence. The thought of what George is implying makes him feel absolutely sick.

"I know how things like this work," George says, and he sounds so small. He turns over, so he lies on his chest. He parts his legs, ever so slightly. "You can do whatever you want to me. Don't want you to kick me out. Just want to be with you."

"Baby," Dream says, the name slipping out before he can catch it, "you're drunk." He reaches over and puts his hand in George's hair. "And I would never leave you alone."

George doesn't respond. He leans into Dream's gentle touches, sighing.

"Sit up," Dream says, suddenly. He cringes at the way George stiffens, like he's scared. Like Dream could ever bring himself to hurt him. George turns over, meeting Dream's gaze, but then shuts his eyes, seemingly affected by his stare. He sits up slowly -- his arms are a little shaky, and he keeps his eyes closed.

"Baby, look at me," Dream says. He speaks softly, but with intent -- the words are for only George to hear. He watches as George opens his eyes, as he blinks, expectant. He watches as George swallows under his stare. Dream leans in and kisses him, briefly, placing his hand on George's cheek. George moves his hands and grips Dream's shirt, attempting to pull him in, waiting for Dream to be rough, to take him like he had so many times before, to let George give him something in return, but Dream holds him steady, keeping his distance.

Dream pulls away, gently, and rubs a thumb across George's cheek. He waits until George makes eye contact, then drops his hand. He prys George's fingers from his shirt, carefully moving his hands away. Slowly, making sure George can follow all his movements easily, Dream removes his shirt. But instead of tossing it aside, as George had, Dream bunches it up and places it over George's head, pulling it down. George, still mildly confused, lets Dream guide his arms through the long sleeves. He lets Dream roll the sleeves up on him, not speaking.

"I know you get cold," Dream says, once he's satisfied. George stares at him with an unreadable expression on his face. "Just- you wanted to do something for me, right?"

"Yeah," George says. He's a little dazed, and his words come out a little sleepy.

"Then don't leave in the morning," Dream says. He reaches over and turns off his lamp, then lies down on the bed, arms open in invitation. When George remains still, Dream speaks once more.

"Just. Let me keep you warm. All I want to do to you right now is keep you warm," Dream says. He reaches over and puts his hand over George's hand. George, accepting the gesture, lets Dream pull him into a warm embrace.

"Okay," George says, relenting. He curls into Dream's side, getting comfortable. After he settles, he speaks again.

"I didn't think you'd like me when I get like this," George says. He speaks so quietly that Dream is uncertain if he's even meant to hear him.

"I like you no matter what," Dream says. He wraps his arm tighter around George, in an attempt at a hug, even though they were already as close as they could be. George makes a content sound, and Dream smiles into his hair.

"What do you want for breakfast?" Dream asks, as he pulls the blanket up over the two of them.

"I like pancakes," George says. He sounds exhausted. Dream makes sure to tuck the blanket around him, keeping him as cozy as possible. He takes care of George like he's something precious.

"Then I'll make you pancakes," Dream whispers.

"I don't like *American* pancakes," George whispers back, and Dream smiles.

"Then I'll wake up before you and learn to make them the way you like," Dream whispers. He pulls George close, keeping him near his heart. George drifts to sleep -- head on Dream's bare chest, under the blankets. Close enough that Dream can make sure that nothing bad can happen to him, at least for tonight.

George wakes up before Dream, about three hours later. He scrambles out of Dream's arms, waking Dream, and promptly stumbles towards the bathroom. Dream is half asleep, but he sits up when he hears the faint sounds of George throwing up.

Dream stumbles out of bed, making his way towards the bathroom. George hadn't bothered turning the light on, so Dream flicks on the light switch and squints at the light.

The light fills the small room, allowing Dream to see George, who is on his knees, hunched over the toilet bowl, trembling. This image alone would be enough to wake Dream up. But when George lets out a sob, Dream startles out of his groggy state. He kneels next to the boy, on the cold linoleum tiles, and places a hand on his back.

"It's okay," Dream says, speaking softly. George makes no indication that he notices Dream is there, but he does seem done with vomiting. He lets out another sob. His shoulders shake.

"Hey, it's okay, don't worry about it," Dream says. "You're okay."

"Hurts," George says. He takes a few deep breaths, seemingly trying to calm himself. "Didn't-didn't eat enough. Burns."

"Did you eat before you started drinking?" Dream asks. George takes a few more shaky breaths. Dream rubs his back.

"Do edibles count?" George asks. He sounds like he's trying to make a joke, but it falls flat. He sits up, then flushes the toilet. Then, he turns around, leaning against it, staring at the wall.

"Baby, that's not good," Dream says. George doesn't respond, nor does he make any move to get up. He just continues to stare at the wall, seemingly too tired to even react.

Dream gets up, then grabs one of his washcloths. He wets it in the sink with warm water, then wrings the excess water out. Then, he kneels next to George, and slowly cleans his face with the wet cloth. George lets this happen, closing his eyes. He looks exhausted.

"I feel gross," George says. He moves to run a hand through his hair, and grimaces when he finds it clumped together and tangled.

"Do you want to shower?" Dream asks, putting the washcloth down. It makes sense -- George had spilled half a beer on himself, and he hadn't cleaned up, besides taking off his soaked shirt. His skin was probably still a little sticky. George looks away from the wall and meets his gaze.

"I'm too dizzy to stand," George says. He closes his eyes again. "I'm pathetic. I'm sorry."

"Don't be sorry," Dream says. He moves some of George's hair out of his forehead. "You don't need to be sorry."

"But I am," George says. He coughs, and it almost sounds like a sob. "Everything hurts. I feel sticky and gross. I'm sorry you have to deal with me."

"I don't have to, I want to," Dream counters. He hesitates before he speaks again. "I'll help you clean up, if you let me."

George doesn't open his eyes, but his cheeks turn a little pink. "That would be nice," he admits.

"Okay then," Dream says. "Then that's what I'll do." He reaches out and rubs his thumb across George's cheek.

"Can you get undressed?" Dream asks. George's cheeks flush pink, and in any other situation, Dream would have found his flustered expression adorable. George nods, then tries to open his eyes, but squints at the light.

"It's bright," George says.

"I can turn on the hallway light instead, and leave the bathroom light off," Dream suggests. George nods. Dream stands up, going to fix the lights, and George moves to take off his shirt.

When Dream returns, George is shirtless, staring at the balled up shirt in his hands. The light from the hallways is far less bright than the harsh bathroom lights, making George look softer.

"Is something wrong?" Dream asks, kneeling once more.

"No I just," George hesitates, for a bit, still staring at the shirt in his hands. "I like wearing your things," he admits. The tips of his ears are turning red, and Dream, though still trying to be as considerate as possible, finds this adorable.

"I'll give you something else to wear, don't worry," Dream says. George looks up, meets Dream's gaze for the first time since waking up. He looks exhausted, and in the dim light, Dream can tell his skin is still flushed pink. "Do you want to-" Dream gestures to George's boxers. George is quiet for a bit, but then whines, burying his face in his hands, taking Dream aback.

"What's wrong?" Dream asks, concerned.

"This is humiliating," George says. He brings his knees up, then rests his head on them.

"Hey," Dream says. He sounds so soft. "Don't worry about it. I'll take care of you."

"Why are you so nice to me?" George asks.

"I love you," Dream says, and it's the first time he's said this to George, but he doesn't regret it. "I love you, and I want to take care of you, no matter what, okay?"

George flushes once more, and nods. Dream kisses the top of his head.

"You're so cute," Dream says. George gives a soft smile at this.

"I'll- I'll get undressed," George says. He moves slowly, still a little weak. Dream strokes George's hair as he does this.

"Can you get in the tub by yourself?" Dream asks, when he's done.

"Yeah," George says. Dream gathers the clothes that George had been wearing. "I can do that."

"I'll put your clothes in the wash," Dream says. "When we wake up, I'll put them in the dryer, and you'll have something warm to wear for the day."

"That sounds nice," George says. He still doesn't meet Dream's gaze, clearly embarrassed.

"Hey," Dream says, sensing this. "I love you, okay? And I don't mind this."

"I feel like a burden," George says. "I feel pathetic."

"You're not," Dream says. He gives George another kiss on the forehead, a loving and intimate gesture. "I love you. I'm going to keep telling you that, just in case you forget, alright?"

George smiles, so soft and so vulnerable in the warm light. It makes Dream's heart pang.

"I like hearing that," he admits. He moves to get in the bathtub.

"Then I'll keep saying it," Dream says. He watches as George gets in the tub, but he lets George do it himself, to save some of the smaller boy's dignity. When George is settled, he reaches over and turns on the faucet, to a nice warm temperature.

Dream stands up, clothes in hand. He opens his medicine cabinet, and grabs his toothpaste and the spare toothbrush that he had bought the other day, with George in mind.

"Here," Dream says, handing both to George. At George's questioning look, Dream feels mildly sheepish. "I bought you a toothbrush, because you've slept here so many times, and like, I thought you might-"

"Thank you," George says, cutting Dream off. He's smiling.

"I'll go wash these, and probably my sheets too -- neither of us properly got dressed before we fell asleep, so they're probably a little grimy," Dream says. George nods, wetting the toothbrush. Dream watches him for a moment, before moving to go throw the clothes in the wash.

He heads to his bedroom, stripping the bed of his sheets, and also picking up George's clothes from the floor. He gathers everything in his arms -- it's not a lot of things, but Dream takes care not to drop anything. He throws everything in the washing machine, then decides, before he shuts the machine, to throw the jeans he's wearing in there as well. He's sure George won't mind -- Dream has slept in far less. He then turns the machine on. Right when he's about to walk away, Dream notices his dryer, and gets an idea.

On his way back to the bedroom, Dream visits the bathroom again. George has placed the toothbrush and toothpaste on the edge of the bathtub, and now sits, staring at the water.

"Hey, are you okay for a few more minutes?" Dream asks. "I just need to put new sheets on the bed."

"I'm okay," George says. Dream, feeling bad about leaving George alone for longer, even for just a few more minutes, leans down and presses a kiss against his hair.

Dream hastily makes his way to the bedroom, then puts new sheets on the bed. Then, he goes into his closet and grabs a pair of sweatpants and one of his long-sleeved shirts, as well as a spare towel. He throws these items into the dryer, then turns it on.

When he gets back to the bathroom, he notices George is shivering. Frowning, Dream reaches over and makes the water warmer.

"I didn't know how to work your water," George says. He closes his eyes, and puts his head down on his knees again. "I'm sorry-"

"Don't even say that," Dream says, cutting him off. He kneels at the edge of the tub, and places a hand on George's back. "I love you, okay? Let me take care of you."

George obliges, a little too worn out to argue. Dream moves his hands towards the faucet, cupping his hands underneath, letting them gather some warm water. He then moves the water to George's hair, wetting it.

"You could have just turned on the shower," George says. He doesn't look up, seemingly content to keep his forehead against his knees. Dream doesn't blame him -- after everything George had done tonight, Dream would have been surprised if he didn't feel sick.

Plus, Dream suspects that George hasn't been eating or sleeping enough. He decides to order breakfast food tomorrow, because he doesn't think he'll be in the mood to cook in the morning, or whenever they wake up. He also makes a mental note to 'accidentally' order too much, and give George some to take home.

"This seemed gentler," Dream says. He ruffles George's hair, trying to get all of it wet. "Is the water alright?"

"Yeah," George says. Dream cups his hands under the faucet, gathering more water, then wets George's hair more.

"It's kinda curly," Dream says, somewhat surprised. He runs his fingers through George's now fully wet hair, which is curling at the ends.

"Oh," George says. He brings his hand up to his hair, patting the curls. "Yeah, it gets like that when it's wet. Or sometimes when it rains, it looks kinda wavy."

"I like it," Dream says. He grabs his shampoo bottle from the side, putting some in his hands. "It's cute."

While Dream cleans George's hair, washing away traces of sweat and beer, George doesn't say anything. But Dream takes care with it, lathering the shampoo, scratching his scalp.

George lets out a content sigh.

"That feels nice," he says. Dream repeats the same scratching motion, which George leans into. "Thank you for this."

"It's not a problem," Dream says. When he's satisfied, he runs his hands under the water again, washing off the suds from the shampoo. He then grabs another washcloth and his bar of soap.

"Can you-" Dream doesn't finish the question, but holds out the items. George nods, then takes them.

"You're cute when you blush," Dream says. Even in the dim light, he can make out George's flushed cheeks. George scoffs, but there's no annoyance behind it, just thinly veiled fondness. He runs the washcloth under the faucet. Dream watches, in an abundance of caution, making sure George is alright with this.

He seems fine, so Dream lets George wash himself, and turns his full attention to his hair. He cups his hands a few more times, gathering more water, and washes the shampoo out.

"I'm so sticky," George says, rubbing the cloth along his arms, leaving trails of suds. "That last beer was kinda pushing it, huh?"

"Everything was kinda pushing it," Dream says, and he doesn't mean to sound judgmental, but he does. He grimaces. "Sorry, that came out wrong. I just worry."

"You don't need to worry," George says. He sounds so resigned. "You're right."

"But I do," Dream says. "I want you to be okay. I don't want you to get hurt."

"I'm not hurting myself," George says.

"You are," Dream says.

"I'm not physically hurting myself," George says.

"You don't have to be," Dream says. George doesn't respond, but seems to be done with the soap and washcloth -- he places both at the edge of the tub, then closes his eyes. He rests his head on his knees again.

"Do you want me to use conditioner, or are you tired?" Dream asks. George sighs.

"You can use it," George says. "Does it smell nice?" Dream picks up the bottle, squinting in the dim light, trying to make out the text.

"I have no clue," Dream says. He pops open the lid, then puts a generous amount into his hands. "I can't read it, it's too dark."

"It probably smells good, because you smell good," George says. Dream lets out a soft laugh, then lathers the conditioner in George's hair. He's slow with it, gentle -- he uses his fingers to get all of the knots out of George's hair.

It's achingly intimate -- Dream washing George's hair in his bathroom with the light off, taking care to be gentle in places where it's knotted. Untangling his hair, but going slowly, making sure that even this action doesn't hurt. When Dream rinses George's hair, he uses only one hand to gather the water and collect it, using the other to make sure that no water drips onto his face.

When the conditioner is rinsed out of George's hair, and he has no more lingering soap suds on his skin, Dream puts his hand on George's back, rubbing soft circles into his wet skin.

"Are we done?" Dream asks. George nods, but doesn't speak. Dream reaches over and turns the faucet off.

"I'm going to go grab you a towel and some clothes, is that okay?" Dream asks. George nods once more, not lifting his head from his knees. In the absence of the warmth of the water, Dream sees George shiver. His heart pangs at the image -- George, absolutely exhausted, curled into a ball, and shivering.

Dream is as quick as he can be -- he nearly jogs to his dryer, pulling out the towel and clothes he had thrown in there, which were now warm. He hastily makes his way back to George, who is still in the same position Dream had left him in.

"Hey," Dream says, kneeling down once more. George looks up, and Dream reaches over and cups his cheek. "Are you sleepy, Georgie?"

"Exhausted," George responds. He leans into Dream's gentle touches without a second thought, seemingly too tired to be embarrassed at this point. Dream indulges him for a bit, moving his hand to George's hair, playing with it in the way he knows George likes.

"Come on," Dream says, removing his hand. George whines softly for a moment, pouting at the lost touch. Dream chuckles at his expression, then drapes the warm towel around George's shoulders. George lets out another soft sigh at the warmth, pulling the towel around him.

"It's warm," George says. He rubs the towel against his cheek, in a movement that almost makes Dream coo. George then pulls the towel tightly around himself, in a gesture that makes Dream feel warm inside.

"I put it in the dryer," Dream admits. He gestures to the clothes he has in his hands. "These too."

"You're so-" George falters, then lets out a yawn. "You're so good," he says, sleepily. Dream smiles.

"Come on sweetheart," he says, not even thinking about the pet name before he says it. "Do you want me to help you?"

"I can do it," George says. He moves to sit on the edge of the tub, towel still draped against his shoulders. Dream hands him the clothes.

Dream has seen George naked before -- multiple times, in all sorts of lighting. Under the harsh light of some public restroom. In the darkness of the janitor's closet. In the moonlight, on Dream's bed, those nights when he could convince George to let Dream take him home. But those were all rough, heat-of-the-moment, passionate things. Never this gentle. Never this intimate, this soft.

George has never let himself be this vulnerable in front of Dream. But tonight -- tonight Dream took care of him, helped him wash his hair, and spoke to him softly, gently. It wasn't rough. It was soft, intimate. It was so, so loving.

Despite the fact that he's seen George naked before, and that he's the one who helped George get cleaned up, Dream turns around when George changes, to give him some privacy.

After a minute, George reaches over and taps Dream. Dream turns back around, and is greeted with the sight of the smaller boy looking absolutely exhausted, but drowning in Dream's clothes. He hadn't bothered rolling the sleeves of his shirt or the sweatpants up, so he's almost completely engulfed in fabric. It makes Dream's heart ache.

"Hey stranger," Dream says. George reaches his arms out -- the sleeves of the shirt come past his hands and flop, slightly. Dream takes this gesture for the invitation it is, and hugs him, leaning down to reach. He places a soft kiss on George's still-wet hair.

"Thank you," George says. He clings to Dream tightly. His words are muffled, and Dream can feel how warm his clothes are.

"Never a problem, with you," Dream answers. He yawns. "Want to get back to bed? We only slept a little bit."

"Yeah," George says. Dream pulls away and stands up, looking back at him.

"Are you still dizzy?" Dream asks. He reaches his hand down, and George takes it. "Can you stand?"

"Not as much," George says. He makes a great show of yawning. "I'm sleepy though." He looks up at Dream with that *look* that Dream can never say no to, with a teasing look in his eyes.

Dream rolls his eyes, but obliges George's unspoken request -- he reaches down and picks him up. George wraps his arms around Dream's neck, and wraps his legs around Dream's torso. Dream makes sure to support him fully, carrying him back to the room. George lays his head on Dream's shoulder.

As he walks back, Dream vaguely realizes that George is clinging to him in a way that makes sure that every part of him and George that can be touching is. The thought makes him smile.

Dream places George on the bed, and he kisses his forehead before he pulls away. Then he climbs into bed with him. Dream guides George to rest his head on his chest, keeping a close hold on him. George accepts this, resting his head against Dream, despite his wet hair. Dream doesn't mind. He just pulls the blankets up around them.

"I love you," Dream says. He holds George so, so close. Keeping him safe. Warm.

George doesn't say it back. Not now. But he rests his head on Dream's chest, close to his heart, and lets out a small sigh of contentment. As they both drift off for the second time that night, Dream thinks that this is enough.

Later, in the afternoon, Dream would wake up first, and George would still be there, arms wrapped around Dream's torso, as close as possible. In the soft light, Dream would wake him up by kissing every part of George's skin that the smaller boy would let him. Kissing a little harsher, biting the skin gently, leaving a few marks, once George woke up.

And for a moment, Dream will stare at this boy, this beautiful boy laying on his bed, hair spread out over the pillow, and know that this is more than enough.

Dream is used to seeing George.

He's used to seeing George at parties, with his hair messy, holding either a glass beer bottle or a red solo cup. He's used to coming up behind George, putting an arm around him. George will always lean into the touch, once he realizes it's Dream.

He's used to seeing George in his bed, shirtless and curled in the grey sheets. He's used to the way that George usually falls asleep first, how even in the dim light, he can make out the red marks all over his skin. How he can lightly trace along them, run his fingers along George's neck, collarbones, chest -- proof that, even just for a moment, George is his.

He's used to seeing George in the mornings in the kitchen, probably wearing one of Dream's shirts that is far too large. He's used to the way he will sleepily nod and let Dream make him breakfast. He's used to watching George leave, though he wishes he isn't.

It's better now though -- George stays in the morning, and only leaves when he needs to go get some homework done, or maybe head to class. Dream doesn't wake up alone in the mornings often anymore. He gets to watch George as he sleeps in the morning, be the first thing George sees when he wakes up.

Their mornings are filled with sleepy kisses and soft touches, and they always part with a kiss and with vague plans to meet again soon. Dream is used to this.

But what Dream isn't used to is seeing George, sitting at the corner table at the on-campus Starbucks, nose deep in a book. He's wearing glasses -- Dream didn't even know that George *wore* glasses -- and he has a sweater on over a white button up. The collar is unfolded, such that it covers George's neck, hiding a hickey that Dream had left two nights prior.

He hadn't even set out with the intention of going to the Starbucks. He had been on his way to the library, to study in some windowless study room until he could bear it no longer. But then it had started to rain, and Dream hadn't had the forethought to bring an umbrella.

So, he ducks into the nearest Starbucks, which, at 4 PM, is nearly empty. Save for a handful of customers, and George, who hasn't noticed Dream walking in. He's fully engrossed in his book.

Dream watches as George picks up his drink and attempts to take a sip, and then frowns when he realizes it is empty. Dream thinks it's the most endearing thing in the world. He walks over, then stands in front of George, seeing how long it will take him to notice Dream standing in front of him.

"You can take the chair," George says, not looking up from his book. Dream chuckles.

"I was actually wondering if I could take a seat," he says. George startles, then finally, *finally* looks up from his book. His cheeks turn a soft shade of pink and oh, *oh* he's caught off guard, and Dream rarely ever catches George off guard, and he's *never* seen George like this. Soft in the light of the coffee shop, reading, in his own little world as the rain pours outside.

"Uhm, hi," George says, blinking. Dream *revels* in the shy tone, how the sleeves of George's sweater just barely come over his hands.

"This seat taken?" Dream asks. George seems mildly at a loss for words.

"There are other empty tables," George points out. He flinches, slightly, as if he hadn't meant for his words to come out as a denial. He looks away from Dream, and his cheeks turn slightly more pink. "I mean--"

"None with as nice a view as this one," Dream says. George fully blushes, now -- the tips of his ears turn pink, and from the way he's playing with his sleeves, Dream has a feeling that George is resisting burying his face in them.

This version of George is interesting. *This* version of George is almost completely separate from the George that Dream is used to seeing -- the reckless, rough-around-the-edges, teasing George. He's gentle, he's flustered, and he's so, *so* soft.

Dream thinks, for a moment, that there is no version of George that exists that he isn't in love with.

"You can sit," George says, and he even sounds a little flustered. Dream bites his tongue to keep from smiling, and takes a seat.

"Mind if I study with you?" Dream asks. "You can read your book."

"Yeah," George says. He still sounds a little awkward, still uncertain by this.

"I didn't know you needed glasses," Dream says. George, at mention, pushes his glasses up the bridge of his nose.

"Only for reading," George says. "I don't wear them, usually."

"Didn't know you could read," Dream says, and George laughs, and he shakes his head. His laughter breaks any remaining tension, and Dream feels his heart warm.

"You can stay," George says, seemingly more comfortable. "But you can't be a bother. This book is really good."

"Alright," Dream says. He smiles. "You can tell me about it when you finish it."

"Okay," George says. He picks up his drink once more, as if to take another sip, but he frowns, remembering that the cup is empty.

"I can throw that out for you," Dream says. George hands him the cup. "I was going to order something."

"It's a bit late for coffee," George points out.

"I was never a big fan of coffee," Dream says. He sighs, and turns towards the Starbucks menu, squinting at the small text. "I want something warm, but I don't like hot chocolate either."

"Caramel apple spice is good," George says. He glances at the empty cup in Dream's hand. "It's like warm apple cider, but with caramel. I like it when it's rainy out."

"Thanks," Dream says. He hums. "I'll try that then," he says, getting up. George nods, then returns to reading his book.

By the time Dream returns, George is fully engrossed in his book once more. He doesn't notice that Dream's holding two cups, at first.

Dream sets down one of the cups in front of George. George blinks, then looks at the drink inquisitively.

"They accidentally gave me two," Dream lies. He doesn't look at George, as he speaks. Instead, he digs through his bag, pulling out his readings, which are thankfully dry, along with a pen and highlighter.

"Liar," George says, still eyeing the drink with apprehension. Dream puts his things on the table, then looks back at George, who is still staring at the drink.

"I wanted to buy a drink for a beautiful boy who reads alone on rainy days," Dream says. George, still, is slightly apprehensive at accepting the gesture, though he does look a bit flustered at the compliment. Dream smiles, and something in him feels brave.

He reaches over and folds George's collar down, revealing the mark that *Dream* had left there. Physical proof that George was his. Dream lets himself run his fingers along the mark. His touch is feather light, barely there, but it's enough to make George blush.

"I don't usually see you dressed like this," Dream says.

"I had a presentation for one of my classes today," George says. He's clearly distracted, cheeks pink, and his breath hitches every time Dream runs his fingers along the mark.

"I like it," Dream says. He lets himself cup George's cheek. George, in spite of his obvious blush, leans into the touch, eyes half-lidded. Dream leans over the table, and kisses George's forehead.

"Take the drink," Dream says. "It's all for you." George, though still apprehensive, resigns himself to accept this -- to accept Dream's gentle affection. He picks up the cup with both hands, lets the warmth seep in.

"Thank you," George says, before he takes a sip. Dream smiles.

"Never a problem, with you," he says, and George hums, then returns to his book. Dream lets himself stare for just a little longer, before looking away with a small smile.

So, they sit together in a Starbucks on a rainy day. George reads his book, turns the page every once in a while, and Dream does his course readings, every so often annotating in the margins.

The rain pours outside.

Dream was half in love with George before they even properly met.

It took some time before George was ready to accept this -- this gentle, genuine sort of love. The kind of love that has no reason. It took some time before Dream understood just how much this can take someone by surprise -- to be given love by someone who expects nothing in return.

But he understands now. George may be reckless, and wild, and seemingly distant, yes, but he's also kind. He's caring.

He tells Dream to bring a jacket when he thinks it will be cold out, even if they're only going out for a little bit. George sends him good morning texts on the days where they don't wake up together, always with either a selfie or some random cat photo attached.

George still likes to go to parties, and Dream will accompany him there. George will let Dream put his arm on his waist, in a gesture that's both protective and possessive. Maybe, he'll somehow manage to drag Dream to the dance floor. Maybe they'll dance a little too suggestively, fueled by shots and whatever else they've taken that night, but they're together. They always arrive together, stay together, then leave together. At the end of the night, Dream still gets to take George home, and George will unashamedly pull Dream's shirts on to sleep, instead of sleeping shirtless. Dream lets him. He always lets him.

They still like to party, but George won't say no to Dream's cheesy date proposals, and even if he won't admit it, Dream knows George loves when he brings him flowers. The first time Dream had showed up at George's dorm with a bouquet of flowers, picked up from a random supermarket, George had scoffed, but had blushed so, *so* obviously. So Dream kept bringing him flowers, just to catch him off guard. He knows George keeps them pressed in between the pages of his textbooks, but would blush immensely if Dream ever brought it up.

George, still, is everything.

On the days when he doesn't have classes in the morning, he sleeps over at Dream's apartment. Dream is taking a few online classes, and will wake up, pry himself from George's arms, and boot up his laptop, fixing his hair with his fingers so he looks somewhat presentable. George grumbles, at the lack of warmth, but will get up and make them both breakfast.

Dream isn't a fan of coffee, so George has taken to making him tea in the mornings, as well as maybe some toast or something small for breakfast, being as quiet as possible as to not disturb his class. Dream always smiles and lets George kiss the top of his head, before George goes off to do homework on the couch.

Things changed between them quickly, honestly. But it was a welcome change.

"Hey Dream, applications for dorms next year just opened," George says from the couch, once Dream emerges from his room. Dream blinks, momentarily forgetting about the mug and plate in his hands.

"Dorms?" Dream asks.

"Yeah," George says. He doesn't look back up at Dream, and there's something hesitant in his tone -- like he wants to say something but doesn't quite know how. "I know I'm here all the time, but I still live in the dorms."

"Just stay with me next semester," Dream says, answering George's unspoken question. "You want to take summer classes too, right? I'll be working in the city over the summer, living in the same apartment. You can just stay here."

George pauses.

"Are you sure that's alright?" George asks. He looks quite uncertain. Dream is about to go sit with him, but his hands are still full.

"Give me a sec," Dream says. He walks to the kitchen and places his dishes in the sink, before walking over to the couch and sitting next to George. George has his laptop open to the university housing portal.

Dream puts an arm around George. George leans into the touch, but keeps his eyes on his laptop.

"You can just stay here," Dream says. "Your roommate is graduating this year anyways, right? Wouldn't you rather be with me than with a random stranger?"

"You know I would," George says. He still sounds hesitant. Dream pulls him closer, pressing his cheek against George's hair.

"You can split rent with me," Dream says. "It would probably be around the same cost as a dorm. Right now I split the rent with my parents, so it would actually kind of be doing me a favor if you paid the other half instead. It would make me feel like more of an adult."

"You're so nice," George says. He looks like he wants to say more, but he falters. George bites his cheek and looks away. Dream frowns at this.

"What's wrong?" Dream asks. He briefly wonders if this is too much, but he dismisses this thought -- if George really didn't want to live with him, he would have come up with some excuse as to why he couldn't. Dream knows him -- well enough to know that George must be thinking about something else that's been bothering him.

George is quiet for a while. He refuses to meet Dream's gaze, instead staring off, seemingly considering his words. He doesn't look sad, but he does look apprehensive. Dream rubs George's shoulder, then kisses the top of George's head.

There's a part of Dream that's worried. But when he thinks about George living with him, about being able to fall asleep with him every night, and wake up with him every morning -- Dream thinks he's never wanted anything as badly. He would wait as long as George needed, listening to whatever he needed to say.

Take your time, Dream thinks. He presses his cheek against the top of George's head. *I'm sticking*

around. Just take your time, then say what you want to say.

"I'm sorry," George says. Dream moves back and looks at him, but George still doesn't meet his gaze. His guilt is almost palpable -- taking Dream aback, for a moment.

"What are you sorry for?" Dream asks.

"For that night you met me at the bar," George says. "I wanted to see you, but I didn't know how to talk to you. I was a coward."

"At the bar?" Dream repeats, confused. George nods, then Dream remembers. The night at the bar. After two weeks of radio silence -- the time that Dream had thought George didn't want him anymore. The memory isn't a great one, but Dream had long since moved past it. He furrows his brows. "George, that was months ago."

"I never said sorry," George says. Dream remembers that night -- how upset he had been at George's apparent apathy. "So this is me saying sorry."

Dream goes quiet. George takes this lack of response as a signal to keep explaining.

"That you didn't think I cared about you. Because I didn't know how to let you care about me," George says.

From the way he says the words *care about*, Dream has a feeling he means the word *love*.

"You scared me, at first," George continues. "But I don't think I explained it well."

"How would you explain it then?" Dream asks. His voice is steady. He's not upset -- more worried than anything. He had long since forgiven George for this.

"Your love is different," George says. "It's different if it's the deserved kind of love. Because then there's a reason you're here and I can make sure that reason doesn't go away so you don't leave."

As George speaks, Dream slowly comes to a realization that he's known this. Maybe not directly, but he understood George in a way he hadn't anyone else before, which is why he had forgiven George before George had forgiven himself. Dream rubs George's shoulder.

"The reason I'm here is because I love you," Dream says. "And maybe there's no logical reason for it. But it's true."

"That's hard for me to accept," George says. He pauses, then corrects himself. "It was hard for me to accept. But I think I understand now."

I feel the same, Dream hears. He smiles. He moves his arm that's around George so that his hand rests in his hair. He twirls George's hair around his fingertips. George leans into the touch.

"I forgive you," Dream says. "I think you knew that. But I don't think I ever said it. So this is me, forgiving you for that night, and for everything before and after that you're carrying with you."

Dream pulls George so he's sitting closer, so their legs are touching. George lets this happen.

"Thank you," George says.

"Never a problem, with you," Dream says. He moves his hand back to George's hair, twirling it between his fingers, making it stand in messy peaks. George rolls his eyes when Dream giggles, but smiles.

They sit in silence for a while. Dream continues playing with George's hair, until George shifts. George moves his laptop off of his lap onto the side, then moves so his head is against Dream's chest. Dream adjusts his arm as well -- he moves so he's half-hugging George. It's cozy.

"I don't think I ever told you what happened in my book," George says.

"Oh yeah," Dream says. It had been a while, maybe a few weeks since he had run into George in that cafe -- but the memory was a fond one. "You said it was good."

"It was," George says. He hums. "It was about love."

"About love?" Dream asks.

"Kind of about love," George says. "But about a lot of other things too."

"Like what?" Dream asks.

"One of the characters -- he was sad, you know? Like, really sad," George says. Dream says nothing, but presses a soft kiss against the top of George's head. George smiles, before continuing. "He hated everything. Well, most things. And he wasn't wrong about it -- he had a pretty shitty life."

"But then he fell in love with someone. And things didn't get better -- not really. He was still sad," George says. "But that love was enough for him to want to keep living. Even though everything was shitty, if he had one thing going for him, then it was enough."

Dream hums, listening intently, content to listen to George's voice.

"Have you ever loved someone that much?" George asks.

Dream knows the answer to this before George even finishes the question. He looks down, smiling.

"Yeah. I have," Dream says. His voice is so soft. He doesn't look away from George.

George doesn't look back at him, but his cheeks and ears turn a pretty shade of pink.

"You're such an idiot," George says.

"Your idiot," Dream says, fondly.

"Yeah," George says. He smiles. "Mine."

"Are you mine?" Dream asks. George seems taken aback by the question, but not in a shocked way. More so like he'd never even considered the contrary.

"That's never even been a question for me. I always thought you knew," George says. Dream feels his heart warm at his words. "From the time we first met. You pulled me into your lap and you put your arms around me, and I thought you must have known. You surrounded me, and I loved it. It terrified me, but I didn't care. I thought that feeling would go away. But it didn't."

"Do you want it to?" Dream asks.

"Not anymore," George says. "I trust you."

"I trust you too," Dream says. He pulls George into his lap, suddenly. George yelps as Dream buries his face in his neck.

"That tickles," George says, squirming. Dream laughs.

"I don't care," Dream says. George whines and giggles more, but then Dream presses his lips to the back of George's neck, and his soft giggles turn into whimpers.

"Dream," George breathes out, gripping the fabric of Dream's sweatpants with his hands. George isn't facing him, which is a problem, because Dream wants to see his expressions. So he reaches over, closes George's laptop, then moves it onto the coffee table.

Then, suddenly, with little warning, Dream moves George so he's laying on the couch, and so that Dream is on top of him. George yelps, but his protests quickly fade when Dream kisses him, slow and sweet.

"You're beautiful," Dream says, as he pulls away. George blushes, and looks up at Dream. Dream boxes him in, but George doesn't seem to mind. He moves one of his hands and brushes Dream's hair off of his forehead.

"I'd like to move in with you," George admits, letting his hand drop. "That sounds really, *really* nice."

"Alright then," Dream says. He holds himself up with his forearms, above George. "I think half your clothes are here already, right? There's about a month left in the semester, and my apartment is still kinda far from your classes. So we can keep doing what we're doing for now, but when finals are over, I'll help you move the rest of your stuff over here."

"That sounds good," George says. He gazes up at Dream with stars in his eyes. "Sounds like a plan."

"Oh, and George?" Dream asks.

"Yeah?" George asks.

"Are we boyfriends now?" Dream asks. George smiles at the question, and Dream can see every part of his expression brighten at the question.

"Yeah," George says. Dream smiles. George reaches up and cups his cheek. "But *I* want to take us on our first date. As boyfriends."

"Alright," Dream says. He leans into the touch. "I thought we've already been on a lot of dates."

"You're right," George says. "We've made out in so many janitor's closets. I'm pretty sure that the custodian in the Computer Science building hates us."

"You counted those as dates?" Dream asks. He thinks of all the times he's gone to go pick up George from his classes, only for George to pull him into the janitor's closet. Not that he minds.

They haven't been caught. But there have been many close calls, and many times the custodian has eyed them with suspicion.

"You didn't?" George asks. Dream chuckles. "I meant our first date as boyfriends."

"Alright," Dream says. He moves his arms, so he's pressing further against George. He smirks when George whimpers at the contact, cheeks flushed.

"Anything for you, sweetheart," Dream whispers, in a voice that makes George shiver.

He leans down again, kissing George once more.

The next morning, George wakes up first. It's Saturday, but they had stayed in the night before, watching old Disney movies and falling asleep early.

It's not that exciting, and it's not reckless. In the evening, Dream had asked George if he'd wanted to go out, but George had refused, instead asking if they could order takeout and lay under the blankets.

Dream, of course, could never say no to George, especially at such a simple request. So he'd ordered food, and they had spent the night huddled on the couch, George taking full advantage of Dream's Disney plus account.

After about three movies, and as much Chinese takeout as they could eat, George was falling asleep on Dream's shoulder. Dream would have been content to let George sleep, and carry him to bed afterwards. But instead, George had yawned, sat up, and insisted they clear the takeaway boxes and put the leftover food in the fridge before going to bed. Dream had obliged.

George had also insisted they both brush their teeth at the same time, and had teasingly flicked toothpaste towards Dream, who simply leaned away, then ruffled George's hair playfully, making him giggle.

When they're done, George tugs him to the bedroom, refusing to go to sleep alone. Dream lets him. George tucked the blankets around them, and then turned on his side, sleepily asking to be held. Dream, of course, had embraced him, snaking his hand under George's shirt, laying his palm flat, feeling George's heart beating.

Dream doesn't think he's slept that well in a very long time.

Sometime in the night, they had shifted so that Dream was on his back, and George had his head on his chest.

George wakes up first, but he stays in bed, tracing shapes on Dream's bare chest until Dream puts his own hand over George's.

"That tickles," Dream says. His voice is a little raspy, and he keeps his eyes closed. "You're giving me goosebumps."

George chuckles, but moves his hand from under Dream's so he can wrap himself around him. Dream accepts this easily, putting his own arms around George, keeping him safe and secure.

Dream almost drifts back to sleep. It's a warm Saturday morning, and he has a beautiful boy in his arms. But then George speaks, waking Dream from his half-asleep state.

"I want to get a tattoo today," George says. Dream hums, indicating he's listening, but he's a bit slow at processing George's words. "I've been wanting one for a while. But I want you to come get it with me."

"I thought you weren't a fan of needles," Dream says, groggily. He opens his eyes, squinting at the light. He grabs his phone from his bedside table and glances at the time -- it's early.

"I'm not," George says. Dream puts his phone down on the bed. "But that's why I'm bringing you. For moral support."

"Is this supposed to be our first date?" Dream says. He's mostly joking, but George responds earnestly.

"Yeah," George says. "Unforgettable, right?"

Dream is unconvinced. "What are you planning on getting?" Dream asks.

"I was thinking of getting like, the number 404 tattooed. On my collarbone? Maybe," George explains. "Like the computer error. The perfect mix of edgy but also nerdy."

"You're just going to get 404?" Dream asks. "What kind of font were you thinking?"

"I actually, uh," George falters, and Dream can feel him take a deep breath before he continues. "I wanted you to write it. On me."

"Write it on you?" Dream echoes.

"If it's too much, I understand," George says. He's a lot more shy now, a lot quieter. "But I would like to."

"I'm still a little lost," Dream says. He rubs George's shoulder in what he hopes is a reassuring motion. "I just woke up, and I'm still processing this. You want me to write the numbers on you?"

"Well, not exactly that," George says. "I want it in your handwriting."

"You want to have my handwriting on you?" Dream asks. He's still processing the request.

A tattoo? In my handwriting? Dream thinks. Honestly, he really likes the sound of it -- it feels like a promise.

You always love leaving marks all over him, Dream argues with himself. *Proof that he's yours. But what's better proof than something permanent like this?*

What Dream realizes, in this moment, is that George knows him as well as he knows George. George had taken months before he even agreed to stay in the morning, and even that had only come after weeks of unease between them. George is reckless and spontaneous, yes, but not with grand gestures like this. It's probably something he'd been wanting for a while.

It's probably something that he thought that Dream would like -- and Dream does. Dream likes this idea very, very much.

It would suit him, Dream thinks. *A small tattoo would be kind of hot, honestly.*

Dream thinks of George with a tattoo, he thinks of touching it, of kissing it while keeping his hands on George's waist, of pinning George down and how George would make pretty, pretty sounds under him while Dream let his hands wander-

"I have bad handwriting," Dream says, realizing he's been silent for far too long. George relaxes at these words, as if he expected a more outright rejection.

"I don't care," George says. He sounds certain, with a conviction Dream hasn't heard from George before. It's a welcome change. "Not if it's you."

"Those are permanent," Dream says, lightly. He knows George knows this.

"I can get it removed," George says, seemingly expecting this.

"It'll scar," Dream points out. He knows that George knows this too.

"Then I guess you're never leaving me," George says. There's something teasing in his tone. Dream feels his heart warm.

"Is that a promise?" Dream asks. He moves his hand to George's hair, softly toying with it as he speaks.

"You tell me," George says.

"Well then," Dream says. "I promise I'm never leaving you."

"Alright," George says. Dream moves his hand out of George's hair to around him again, embracing him.

"Will you?" Dream asks.

"I'm never leaving you either," George says.

"That's not a promise," Dream says.

Some part of him thinks that maybe it's a bit strange that he's as willing to accept this as he is -- to accept George's blatant promise. It feels maybe too exclusive, considering that they've only really made their relationship official the day prior.

"I promise I'm never leaving you too," George says. Dream smiles.

But it's different between them. It's more than just the instant connection between them -- Dream had loved George from the moment he saw him, yes, but Dream also had to watch as George struggled to accept it. It hurt at times, yes, but George was worth it.

George was worth everything.

"You can't be the only one getting a tattoo," Dream says. "I want one too."

"What would you get?" George asks. Dream thinks for a moment, then smiles.

"A smiley face," Dream says.

"That's kind of boring," George says.

"You have to draw it," Dream says. "Then I'll get it tattooed. We can even get it in the same spot."

"Are you sure?" George asks. "You don't have to."

"I want to," Dream says. "Ever since I met you. It's always been you. I didn't know it was possible to fall in love with someone that quickly. But you proved me wrong."

"I know what you mean," George says. "You took me by surprise. And I did so many things that were shitty. But still, you're here."

"I'm never leaving," Dream says. "I'll stay as long as you'll let me."

"Well then, you better get settled," George says. "I'll let you stay. No limit. You're here."

"You could do anything," Dream admits. "You could do anything, but I'll always be here for you."

George doesn't respond to this out loud, but Dream sees George's soft smile, and he can't stop the grin that comes to his face. Dream shifts George over, then turns so they're facing each other.

"Well then," Dream says, reaching over to cup George's cheek. "Do you know any tattoo shops?"

George has spent many, many nights in Dream's apartment.

But this is the first night since he's officially moved in.

They had both chosen to head to bed early -- a bit worn out from moving all of George's things into Dream's, no, *their* apartment. Suitcases and random items still lay strewn across the floor of the bedroom, as well as in the living room, as neither of them had the energy to unpack.

They had both had a bit of wine -- George had said that it was a special occasion, and looked at Dream with an expression that Dream has never been able to say no to. Plus, he wasn't wrong -- moving in together felt, in the simplest terms, *right*.

So they lay together, a little tipsy, in *their* bed, instead of *Dream's* bed.

It's a welcome change. They lay slide by side, facing each other.

George, Dream thinks, looks absolutely ethereal in the moonlight. But, then again, Dream thinks George looks ethereal all the time.

Dream reaches over and places his hand on George's cheek. George smiles, then looks up at Dream.

"How do you keep from being sad?" George asks. Dream hums, thinking of an answer. As he does this, he absent-mindedly runs his thumb on George's skin. After a moment of consideration, he looks down at George, and he can't stop the smile that comes to his face as he gazes down at this beautiful boy who is *his*.

"I don't," Dream says, truthfully. "I don't try not to be sad. I am sad. Sometimes I feel so sad I forget what it's like to be happy. But there's always good things that come, eventually. So I guess I just wait."

"I'm so happy right now," George says. Dream feels a warmth that spreads from his chest to his fingertips. He wouldn't be able to stop smiling, even if he tried. "I'm happy with you."

"Me too," Dream says. He rubs his thumb along George's cheek again, and doesn't try to stop himself from staring. "Sometimes, all you can really do is find something that makes you happy and hold on to it for as long as you can."

"Well then, what is that something for you?" George asks. Dream smiles, pulling him in closer.

"Sometimes, all you can really do is find someone that makes you happy and hold on to them as long as they'll let you," Dream says. He speaks softly, into George's hair. George giggles at the sensation.

"I'd let you hold on to me forever," George says.

"Yeah?" Dream asks. He moves back, slightly, so that he can look George in the eyes.

"Yeah," George says. He doesn't break eye contact, but his cheeks turn slightly pink. "I'm not

scared anymore."

"Well then," Dream says, feeling his heart squeeze. "I guess we're on the same page."

"I guess we are," George says.

"Are you going to tell me you love me now?" Dream asks.

"Has that ever even been a question?" George asks. There's something teasing in his tone.

"It was," Dream says. He sees the way that George tenses slightly at his tone, but Dream's quick to comfort. He kisses George all over his cheeks, in his hair, anyplace that George will let him until he's giggling and pushing Dream away.

"But then it wasn't," Dream says, once George stops giggling. George is breathless, and looks back at him with a smile. Dream is certain he would do anything to keep George smiling like this, to have him never be sad again.

But even if you're sad, I'm here, Dream thinks. Nothing is so bad that the world has ended.

"I love you," George says. "I love you in the way that makes me want to keep living." He's a little breathless, but his eyes are shining. "I love you enough that I could live forever."

"Then I'll love you forever," Dream says. He moves his hand to George's collarbone. He rubs his thumb against the tattoo that he had watched George get, and remembers how hard George had squeezed his hand when he got it. He thinks of his own tattoo -- in the same place. The little smiley face that George had drawn for him.

"Forever. I like the sound of that," George says, and it shouldn't feel this simple, but it is. George leans in and brushes his lips against the spot right under Dream's collarbone, on his inked skin. Dream is certain that, if he tried, George would be able to hear his heart beating. He smiles.

"Forever and then some," Dream says, and it's a promise.

End Notes

twitter: @authorialintent (that's a one not an L)

if you liked this fic leave a kudos/comment!! :D i hope you enjoyed <3 <3

shoutout to tree and ro for reading my drafts and beta-ing :)

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